

## A GABBIN BIRD LIST

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Following on D. Reid's paper on the birds of Bunketch (W.A. *Naturalist*, vol. 3, 1951, p. 68), these notes from an adjacent district may be of interest for comparative purposes.

Gabbin lies 40 miles south-east of Bunketch and 57 miles east of Wongan Hills in a marginal wheat-producing area. My observations were made during the period from November 23 to December 31, 1951, when I was employed on the local wheat bin. This work gave me ample opportunity to observe and to investigate most of the bush lying within three miles of the siding.

The country around the township was very largely cleared, but to the north of the railway line were some fairly large expanses of hush. Some of these areas were eucalypt forest, containing Salmon Gum and Gimlet and with a fairly open forest floor. The rest of the bush consisted mainly of *Casuarina* and *Leptospermum* together with masses of lesser shrubs which formed a dense undergrowth. Other less extensive habitats were the mallee stands, and the open sandplain areas covered with small shrubs—*Grevillea*, *Hakea*, *Acacia*, etc.

Adjacent to the railway siding lay a dam, which held water all through the period of observation. Being the only open water for some miles around, it attracted parrots and Bronzewing Pigeons in large numbers at dawn and dusk. On its banks stood a group of red-flowering mallces, whose profuse blossom attracted many honeyeaters. These trees were apparently the only ones of their type for some distance.

The weather was usually hot and dry, but one thunderstorm occurred in the first week of December. This produced an enlivening effect on many of the birds, especially the thornbills and honeyeaters. Their activity soon abated when more seasonal weather returned.

During my stay I recorded 50 species, but the list is by no means complete. Observations made over an entire year, and an investigation of the salt lakes lying 15 miles to the south, east and west would have made the survey far more adequate.

### LIST OF BIRDS

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*).—Reported to be common in areas away from the township. One young individual was brought in to me for examination.

Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*).—One pair flushed from low grassy tussocks. No definite identification could be made from the brief glimpse I obtained.

Bronzewing Pigeon (*Phaps chalcoptera*).—The dam opposite the siding attracted many at evening; 43 were seen drinking between 10 and 30 minutes after sunset on one occasion.

Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*).—A pair seen on several occasions. This species is reported to have arrived in the district only in the latter half of 1951.

Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*).—Frequent on cultivated land. Birds observed in parties of up to five in number, and were often heard calling at night.

Avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*).—Not recorded, but reported to appear occasionally on water holes in the district.

? Little Eagle (*Hieraetus morphnoides*).—A raptor which may have been this species rather than the Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*) was seen occasionally. One was observed to kill a rabbit, dropping on it from about 50 feet with half closed wings, and killing it instantly.

Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*).—The common hawk of the district.

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*).—Two parties seen, one of two birds and one of six. Both flocks were in transit.

Galah (*Kakaloe roseicapilla*).—Very common throughout the cultivated areas.

Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus*).—Flocks of about 30 birds seen on several occasions, though always in transit.

Mulga Parrot (*Psephotus varius*).—Occurs frequently in the *Casuarina* thickets, where the cones seem to be an especial attraction.

Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*).—Not recorded, but some marbled feathers that I found in the lining of a Yellow-tailed Thornbill's nest indicated the presence of the species.

Owlet Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristatus*).—One seen resting on a dead limb an hour after sunset on a full moonlight night. It later flew off to forage in a Salmon Gum forest.

Rainbow-bird (*Mcrops ornatus*).—Not recorded. It was reported to be generally an abundant bird during summer, but this year it was unusually sparse.

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—Present during November. The last record was of a call heard on December 3.

Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo (*Chaleites basalis*).—Present at the townsite during November. My last record was of one calling on December 1.

Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*).—Common at the townsite.

White-backed Swallow (*Cheramœa leucosterna*).—Two pairs resided at the townsite and a flock of 8 was seen on one occasion.

Tree-Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*).—Common at the townsite.

Willy Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).—Pairs holding territories at the townsite and in roadside vegetation.

Western Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla rufiventris*).—Present in the area, but retiring, and not often observed. Heard calling occasionally.

Crested Bell-bird (*Oreica gutturalis*).—These were usually heard calling from *Casuarina* areas.

Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*).—Moderately frequent in forest areas.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*).—A pair present at the townsite throughout my stay.

White-winged Triller (*Lalage sueurii*).—My only record was one male seen on December 2, in the railway station yard.

Southern Scrub-Robin (*Drymodes brunneopygia*).—Only one individual was observed in some low sand-plain scrub.

White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*).—Flocks occurred frequently through the *Casuarina* thickets, and their disused nests are a feature of these areas.

White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*).—Small flocks occasionally seen, particularly along the railway reserve.

Crimson Chat (*Epthianura tricolor*).—Flocks of about 8 individuals were seen on five occasions at various points through the district, though always in roadside bushes. Out of the 43 individuals observed, only one fully plumaged cock was seen.

Weebill (*Smicrornis brevirostris*).—Very common in eucalypt areas.

Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*).—This was the least common of the local thornbills, and was usually found associated with the Yellow-tailed Thornbill.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*).—The commonest bird in the *Casuarina* thickets. It was frequently associated with Brown and Chestnut-tailed Thornbills, as well as Redthroats and Weebills. Numerous unoccupied nests were found.

Chestnut-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza uropygialis*).—Occurs in the *Casuarina* scrub areas, where it forages in larger, denser flocks than the other thornbills.

Redthroat (*Pyrholaemus brunneus*).—Occasionally noted in thickets. One pair was observed in display in November; the birds indulged in vigorous song and pursuit, interspersed with rapid see-saw movements similar to those of the Rufous Whistler. The whole display was located in one small bush.

Black-faced Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cinereus*).—Common during my visit to the district, but they are reported to appear only periodically. Several farmers considered that these invasions have a reducing influence on the grasshoppers which are troublesome in the locality from time to time.

Brown Honeyeater (*Gliciphila indistincta*).—Occasionally noted, especially feeding in the red flowering mallees at the dam.

Singing Honeyeater (*Meliphaga virescens*).—Frequent in eucalypt areas. One pair of chicks which had only just left the nest noted on November 25.

White-eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga leucotis*).—Seen always in the red-flowering mallees at the dam.

Yellow-throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*).—A flock of about 20 birds resident at the townsite.

Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*).—A few in the Salmon Gum forest.



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*).—Only two pairs seen, both in the railway station yard.

Australian Pipit (*Anthus novæ-seelandiæ*).—Restricted to cultivated land, and the railway reserve.

Zebra Finch (*Poephila castanotis*).—A small flock seen in the station yard on one occasion. Old nests were noted several times.

Crow (*Corvus sp.*).—Flocks were noted throughout the area. Since I was not able to examine a specimen, the birds were not positively identified.

Squeaker (*Strepera versicolor*).—Only one pair was seen; these resided in the timber adjacent to the dam.

Grey Butcher-bird (*Cracticus torquatus*).—This was the common butcher-bird in the area. A family party was located in the station yard, and became very confiding, coming inside the hut for meat scraps or cheese.

Pied Butcher-bird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*).—Seen on only two occasions.

Western Magpie (*Gymnorhina dorsalis*).—Only one flock of 8 individuals in the township area—none was seen in the surrounding country.

## PRESENT CLIMATIC FLUCTUATIONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By J. GENTILLI, Nedlands.

Biogeographers have repeatedly noticed slight changes in the geographical distribution or in the habitats of some species, or in the relative abundance of communities or individuals. There have been records of "invasions" of wet areas by "dry" species, and there have been records of the dying out of certain communities over small areas which have become unsuited to their continued existence.

It is too easy to blame or thank Man for these changes. It is quite possible that the abundance of very young individuals of the Western Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*) may be due to lack of competition by other species which have been cut down too ruthlessly by Man, but is there any proof of this fact? Does not *Eucalyptus rudis* grow where the ground water comes so close to the surface that no other local species of *Eucalyptus* could survive? Around several swamps which have gradually become lakes, Paperbarks (*Melaleuca*) have died, literally drowned. Obviously the water table has come closer to the surface. But is this a change restricted to the Perth area, or is it only part of a general change which affects large regions or perhaps the whole continent? Over large regions of Western Australia a change is quite apparent, namely the rise of salt to the surface of the soil. It is a problem which has baffled expert opinion for years. Perhaps the clearing of the native vegetation has altered